

Dressing

The way we dress says a lot about who we are. But as dementia progresses people increasingly need more help with dressing. As a carer, if you help the person with dementia to choose what they wear and retain their own individual style, you can help them to preserve their identity.

For most of us, dressing is a very personal and private activity - and one in which we are used to making our own decisions. It's important to enable people with dementia to make their own choices for as long as they can. If they do need assistance, be sure to offer it tactfully and sensitively.

Make it fun

If you are helping someone with dementia to dress, allow plenty of time so that neither of you feels rushed. A person with dementia may take longer to process information than they used to, and this will affect their ability to make choices. If you can make dressing an enjoyable activity, they will feel more relaxed and confident.

- Try to use the time to chat about what you are doing and anything else that might be of interest.
- If the person resists your efforts to help, try leaving them for a while. They may be more amenable if you try again a little later.

There's plenty you can do to help the person retain some choice and their own personal style while making sure that they are clean, warm and comfortable. Here are some ideas.

Encourage independence

- Lay out clothes in the order the person will put them on. Sensitively remind them which garment comes next, or hand them the next item that they need.
- If they are confused, give instructions in very short steps, such as, 'Now put your arm through the sleeve.'
- If they get it wrong - for example, by putting something on the wrong way round - be tactful, or find a way for you both to laugh about it.
- Label drawers where particular items of clothing are kept, or store whole outfits together.

Keeping comfortable

When the person is getting dressed:

- Make sure that the room is warm enough.
- Try to encourage them to go to the toilet before getting dressed.

- Try to keep to the routine the person is used to - for example, they may prefer to put on all their underwear before putting on anything else.
- If they wear several layers of thin clothing rather than one thick layer, you can suggest removing a layer if it gets too warm.
- Remember that the person may no longer be able to tell you if they are too hot or cold, so keep an eye out for signs of discomfort.

Giving the person choice

- Wherever possible, ask the person what they would like to put on. People with dementia need the dignity of having choice in what they wear, but too many options can be confusing. It's probably better to make suggestions one at a time.
- If they live on their own and have lots of clothes, select the ones that they're most likely to wear and put them in an accessible place. This will make it easier for the person to choose.

Buying clothes

- If you're buying clothes for the person with dementia, make every effort to take them with you, so that they can choose the style and the colours they prefer.
- Check their size. They may have lost or gained weight without you realising it.
- Look for clothes that are machine washable and need little ironing. This will save you time.

Changing clothes

The person you're caring for may be reluctant to undress even when they go to bed, or they may refuse to change their clothes. It's important to make sure the person changes their clothes frequently without getting upset. Here are a few strategies you could use to persuade them:

- Remove the dirty clothing and put clean clothing in its place when they're in the bath or shower.
- Persuade them to change because someone is visiting.
- Say how much you'd love to see them wearing something new.

Unusual clothing

As long as it does no harm, it's probably better to accept the person dressing in an unusual way, or wearing clothing that is out of place, than to have a confrontation. If they're determined to wear a hat in bed, for example, or a heavy coat in summer, try to respect their choice.

Other aspects of grooming

When the person is dressed, help them with their hair. A woman may like to wear makeup or perfume. If she likes wearing jewellery, this is another opportunity for her to have a say in her appearance. If she enjoys having her nails painted, you might like to do this for her. A man may like to have his hair dressed with Brylcreme or to wear cuff links.

Boosting confidence

Helping a person to look good is an important way to maintain their confidence. Regularly compliment the person on the way they look, and encourage them to take pride in their appearance.

What to wear

Look for clothes that are easy for the person to put on and take off, particularly if they live on their own, such as clothes with larger neck openings and front fastenings or no fastenings.

If you or the person you're caring for are struggling with getting dressed or undressed, make sure they have the right clothing, or make some adaptations:

- Use Velcro fastenings rather than buttons, or hooks and eyes.
- Shoes with laces may be difficult for someone with dementia to manage. Try wellfitting slipon shoes or shoes with velcro fastenings, or replace shoelaces with elastic.
- Try to make sure the person doesn't wear slippers for more than a few hours as they may not offer enough support to the feet.
- If you're caring for a woman, front-opening bras will be easier for you both to manage. Try to avoid selfsupporting stockings as they can cause circulation problems.
- For men, boxer shorts may be easier to manage than Y-fronts.

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